

# **ADEPT Political Commentaries**

November-December 2004

### **"3D" strategy - from "extremism" to consensus?**

Oazu Nantoi, 3 November 2004

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Immediately after the armed conflict in the Eastern regions of the Republic of Moldova (Transdnister) in the summer of 1992, the interest of Moldovan society to that issue was fading. Politicians of every ideological stripe that succeeded each other in power have unofficially set a taboo on Transdnistrian conflict. It didn't come to the mind of Moldovan governors to question the format of the peacekeeping troops in the security zone, as it was outlined on July 21, 1992 in the "Agreement on Peaceful Settlement of the Armed Conflict in the Transdnister Region of the Republic of Moldova", document that in fact legalized paramilitary structures of the so-called Moldovan Dniestrian Republic (MDR). As for the Russian troops and munitions illegally located on the soil of the Republic of Moldova, there were of more concern to Americans than domestic patriots.

While governors and opposition were jostling for influence, the generous gesture made by Chisinau on February 7, 1996 when it handed over to Tiraspol customs seals of the Republic of Moldova, was left unnoticed. Back then Igor Smirnov decided it was the right time to appoint his son as the Chair of the State Customs Committee. Even the Memorandum of May 8, 1997 being truly unconstitutional was left unnoticed by the Moldovan society as it was struggling with dire social-economic straits. Indeed, politicians and public officials in Chisinau who realized that in political meddling with Tiraspol they might earn a fortune, fully exploited this apathy in society. Thus Moldovan society was split into two parallel worlds. One - society indifferent to the conflict. The other - the underworld merged with the political elite in Chisinau, Kiev and Moscow that fully benefited of the "frozen" conflict. Sporadic attempts by journalists, publicists to draw the attention of the public to the things happening failed, but those who dared to speak up were immediately labelled as "extremists".

In the spring of 2000 Institute for Public Policies embarked on studying regional conflicts and Transdnistrian conflict in particular. Step by step a number of studies were produced, all of them pointing to the effect that both the "unique" formula of the peacekeeping forces and "five-sided" negotiated format were imposed so as to allow Russian Federation to keep the situation under its control and prevent the resolution of the conflict.

Things started to change immediately after parliamentary elections of February 2001. Reintegration of the country has taken centre stage. In many of his declaration and actions President Voronin drew public's attention to the Transdnistrian issue, teetering from huge concessions to Tiraspol to dubbing Igor Smirnov "bandit and mafia", move followed by the introduction of new customs seals.

The idea to settle Transdnistrian conflict by turning Republic of Moldova into a federative state was yet another challenge for the Moldovan society. For the first time, West formed a joint front with OSCE and Russia and endorsed the initiative. For the first time the pages of governmental media were open to opposition forces to have their say on the federalisation. Debates that followed highlighted the weaknesses of the federalization idea - holding a referendum and questionable viability of the federative state established by mechanically assembling

Transdnistrian regime, dubbed as criminal by Moldovan authorities, and what currently is the Republic of Moldova. None of the proponents of federalization was able to tell what would happen to the Republic of Moldova in case the referendum on federalization was to fail, or how viable the "reunited" state would be if the repressive structures of the Tiraspol regime were not eliminated first.

3D strategy was launched in the summer of 2003 after it became clear that ideas formulated in IPP's studies needed a "packaging" able to compete with the "federalisation" formula. The end-goal was very clear while developing the 3D strategy. The reintegrated state was to become viable, democratic, prosperous, European-oriented and "immune" to any recurrence of secessionism. This is feasible as citizens on both sides of Dniester do not view each other as enemies. This last thing, has led us to the conclusion that *Igor Smirnov's clan should not be allowed to the negotiation table, as it represents foreign geopolitical and economic-criminal interests and seeks to hinder conflict resolution.*

Respectively, 3D strategy provides for eliminating all the obstacles for the reintegration of the Republic of Moldova, establishing efficient mechanisms and mobilizing resources necessary. At the same time, the strategy also envisages blocking any possibility for Tiraspol regime to pursue the aforesaid interests (geopolitical and international organized crime network) that kept them alive. The gist of the strategy resumes to three major goals - *Demilitarization* of the Moldovan Dniestrian Republic (withdrawing Russian Federation troops and dismantling its MDR's potential) *Decriminalization* of the entire region by halting smuggling and *Democratization* of the Republic of Moldova as a whole.

3D strategy includes a psychological element as well - for 15 years MDR's public opinion is manipulated; it was raised in the fear for the enemy from the right bank of Dniester. It would take time to demolish those stereotypes, time in which some positive expectations should be brought to the people of Transdnistria as regards perspective of country reintegration, democratization of entire society, and European future of the Republic of Moldova.

In the summer of 2004 a group of independent experts from Moldova and abroad decided to draft and present to the public 3D strategy and a Road Map that would clearly outline to be undertaken actions and responsibilities of the actors involved in the process of reintegrating Moldova. This initiative of the civil society has a twofold goal. On the one hand, to provide a document to the political elite and society at large that would pave the way to a national consensus on settling Transdnistrian conflict. Similarly, 3D and Road Map are to show the West that at last Republic of Moldova has realized what it wants as regards Transdnistrian conflict, that it knows how to reintegrate the country and is ready to assume its share of responsibility. So far twenty six NGOs endorsed the document that was presented to the major political parties of Moldova. Latest declarations made by President Voronin as regards Transdnistrian conflict are to a large extent in line with the main principles of 3D strategy. Apparently, all the premises for achieving a national consensus on Moldova reintegration seem to be there, however the time will show to what extent Moldovan society and its so-called political elite are ready to this breakthrough. There is only one alternative to reintegrating the country and a very tough one - continuous degradation of the idea of Republic of Moldova statehood.

## Stability and Security Pact for the Republic of Moldova

Igor Botan, 8 November 2004

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### **a) Initiative of the Head of the State**

On 1 June 2004, President Vladimir Voronin proposed to Russia, USA, Romania, Ukraine and European Union (EU) to hold a political conference at the level of heads of foreign policy departments, within which to sign a Stability and Security Pact for the Republic of Moldova (SSPRM), "with the status of international law document"<sup>1</sup>. SSPRM was intended to underlie "an efficient system of long-term guarantees for the entire Moldovan state, which would offer the ground for unique approaches to the issues related to the development of democratic institutions, for ensuring civil concord in the country and for solving as soon as possible the Transdnistrian problem". The head of the state identified five problems that require the adoption of a consensual position by the mentioned parties, so that they further guarantee support of: 1) realization of territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova (RM); 2) creation of conditions in view of the participation of the entire society in the free democratic process on the entire territory of RM; 3) cultural, ethnical and linguistic diversity as a fundamental value of the poly-ethnical state RM; 4) creation of a common defense system on the entire soil of the Republic of Moldova and guarantee of permanent strategic neutrality of the country; 5) full and final settlement of Transdnistrian issue based on the federative principles.

### **b) Reasons for launching the initiative**

Upon launching the SSPRM idea, President Voronin mentioned that he was thus proposing finding a "multilateral compromise in a number of principle issues related to Moldova's statehood", which can "constitute the guarantee of a long-term stability in this region"<sup>2</sup>. Otherwise, if the parties do not reach a mutual understanding on the Pact "this will have obvious repercussions for the stability and security in this region".

Obviously, this was a warning. Finding a "multilateral compromise" is timely if the mentioned parties are engaged in a dispute or competition for the realization of some antagonistic interests. The signing of such a document would mean acknowledging the existence of such antagonistic interests and committing to stop pursuing them on the territory of RM.

The ideologists of the governing party themselves have demonstrated the truthfulness of this. In this regard quite relevant is the article published in the semi-official newspaper *Nezavisimaya Moldova* signed by the MP of the majority faction, member of the Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Policy, Ivan Grec. The main purpose of the article entitled "Let's dot all 'i's and cross all 't's"<sup>3</sup> was to justify President's refusal to sign one year ago, on 25 November 2003, the Kozak Memorandum on solving the Transdnistrian conflict, after he had initialed it. The author's main theses were the following: 1) RM entered the zone of interest of the West after NATO extension, which, headed by USA, started to strengthen its military-strategic presence in the South-Eastern Europe; 2) after signing the agreement within the Istanbul summit on the withdrawal of troops and munitions from Transnistria, Russia lost the capacity of influencing by itself the process of solving the Transdnistrian conflict; 3) the West and Russia have entered into a geostrategic

competition in the region, the latter opposing to the extension of the West through its available means (military presence and support of the Transdnistrian regime); 4) the West's plan for solving the Transdnistrian conflict by federalizing RM (proposal of OSCE in Kiev) began to compete with the Russian plan (Kozak Memorandum); 5) the West holds "the necessary levers (financial-economic and political) to destabilize the situation in RM", while Russia has lost its levers of influence on RM.

Conclusion: 1) the West got scared that the signing of the Kozak Memorandum would include RM in Russia's geostrategic influence sphere for ever, thus devaluing the agreement signed at the OSCE summit on the withdrawal of troops and munitions from RM; 2) "the Kozak Memorandum was not signed due to the tough rivalry between two geopolitical forces for influence in RM"; 3) the geopolitical forces preoccupied with the promotion of their interests do not understand the deadlock in which RM found itself; 4) "without a compromise, without a consensus, between the West (OSCE, EU, USA) and Russia, the Transdnistrian problem cannot be solved observing the sovereignty and independence of RM"; 5) it is not President Voronin's fault to have renounced signing the Kozak Memorandum, "somebody out there does not like the independence in adopting decisions and the independence of the Moldovan President's behavior".

There is no doubt that the respective conclusions make allusions that President Voronin had allegedly given up in front of a blackmail from the West, which "holds the necessary levers (financial-economic and political) to destabilize the situation in RM". In these circumstances, the author suggested that: 1) the Transdnistrian conflict cannot be solved without a consensus between Russia and the West, therefore "the five-sided format of negotiations should be changed, so that the OSCE inefficiency is replaced with EU as an adequate partner for Russia, and these should agree to engage in finding a compromise in an extremely important problem for our country"; 2) RM must "triple its efforts in the mediation of Russia-EU relations in order to make them look for a solution that is acceptable and favorable for Moldova's reintegration"; 3) "in no way should the freezing of the conflict be admitted, which in such a case could last for tens of years, which is extremely dangerous for our state".

### **c) Internal reactions to SSPRM**

The Moldovan public opinion showed its reserved attitude towards the President's initiative. Non-affiliated press qualified the SSPRM idea as an attempt to transform RM into a protectorate of the neighboring countries and of the big powers<sup>4</sup>.

The main reasoning for the skeptical attitude towards the initiative referred to the fact that SSPRM could become "an international law document" only being ratified by the legislative forums of the signing states. Taking into account that Moldovan authorities took those whom they invited to sign the SSPRM by surprise, without consulting with them in advance, it was hard to imagine how it would be possible to get to the stage when, for example, the US Congress, the Russian State Duma, or the Supreme Rada of Ukraine would include in their agendas the examining SSPRM.

#### **d) Reactions of parties invited to sign the SSPRM and their effects - SOS!**

As it was to be expected, those invited to sign the SSPRM did not hurry to give an answer, affirming, as usual, that "the initiative is interesting and it will be carefully examined". In those circumstances, the semi-official *Nezavisimaya Moldova* published one more article entitled "At the intersection of all difficulties<sup>5</sup>", signed by the same author, in which he practically reiterates the same theses, only completing them as follows: 1) Russia made a big mistake on 4 July 2003, when, on the occasion of signing a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with Romania, it also signed the "Common Declaration" by which the parties condemned the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact; 2) Russia shows political short-sightedness because it does not realize its own interest in RM, which consists in supporting the current governors, and not the separatist regime; 3) USA, EU, OSCE and EC, after "having sunken the signing of the Kozak Memorandum" do not hurry to help RM with solving the Transdnistrian conflict; 4) the continuation of the geopolitical rivalry between the West and Russia leaves few chances for RM's reintegration; 5) Chisinau cannot change the format of negotiations, nor can it abandon it, if the East and the West do not come with alternative propositions; 6) It is more and more difficult for RM to promote a bi-dimensional foreign policy, therefore, the Transdnistrian deadlock endangers the fate of the Moldovan state itself.

#### **e) "We write one, while have two in mind" formula**

After the breaking out of the "school war", the response measures of the Moldovan authorities on the imposition of restrictions on the export of goods from the separatist region were not supported by Russia and Ukraine, states which President Voronin accused of supporting the separatist regime and violation of the bilateral agreements. As a result, RM announced: 1) renunciation on dialogue with the current Transdnistrian leaders; 2) giving up on the five-sided process of negotiation; 3) renunciation on the federalist formula of conflict solving.

Thus, half a year before the parliamentary elections, the governors found themselves in a deadlock both as regards perspectives to settle Transdnistrian conflict, and from the viewpoint of foreign relations. Indeed, what kind of foreign policy successes and mutual trust relations with the main foreign partners of RM can we talk about, if they are publicly suspected of plotting obscure plans against RM?

In order to find a justification of the deadlock situation, the press service of the governing party "The Communist" published in September-October 2004 a series of articles with the generics "Who and what fishes in the Transdnistrian whirlpool"<sup>6</sup>, in which it imputes to the countries invited to sign the SSPRM, that in their relations with RM, they say one thing, but think and do another, in accordance with the formula - "we write one, while have two in mind". Actually, the Communist reproduces the older, above-mentioned, theses but sets them forth more explicitly, blaming Romania, Russia, USA and Ukraine for pursuing setting the border on Dniester River.

#### **f) Vicious circle or fate's irony**

At present, USA, EU and Romania declare themselves favorable to the signing of a Declaration on the Stability and Security of RM, this meaning only assuming some moral obligations to

support RM's requests. No mention about signing a Pact, which, as the Moldovan President was insisting, was to be "an international law act". The irony is that the Declaration would have to be signed during the OSCE Inter-Ministerial Summit to be held in Sofia at the beginning of December 2004. And this after the head of the state signed the anti-OSCE declaration, condemning "the disparity between the increased activism of OSCE regarding its support of democratic standards and its passivity in the settlement of the "frozen" conflicts on the CIS territory".

Also interesting is the fact that exactly the same persons said to have convinced President Voronin not to sign the Kozak Memorandum have recently met, in September-October this year, and had a telephone conversations with him, after which followed the idea of signing within OSCE the Declaration of Stability and Security for RM. We are talking about the Secretary General of NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, who was then the Acting Chairman of OSCE; US Ambassador to RM, Heather Hodges; and the High Commissioner of EU for Foreign Policy and Security, Javier Solana. On the other hand, Ukraine and Russia are avoiding giving a final answer on whether they will sign the Declaration. In this sense, it is curious that USA, EU and RM are making an appeal to Russia and Ukraine to sign the Declaration through the Permanent Council of OSCE in Vienna<sup>7</sup>. Should this mean that direct communication channels with the strategic partners of RM are not functioning already?

It is not excluded that Russia and Ukraine will condition the signing of the Declaration with Chisinau's return to the table of negotiations with the Transdnistrian leaders, observance of all previous agreements within the five-sided framework, acceptance of the federalist formula of solving the conflict. And this the more so as USA and EU did the exactly the same thing, stating in addition that they did not insist on becoming mediators, being satisfied with the status of observers in the process of conflict resolution. Otherwise, the status quo preceding the launching of the SSPRM would be restored.

### **g) Conclusions**

1. The West is offering President Voronin a solution to get out honorably from the deadlock created after the launching of SSPRM initiative, even though it only accepted to sign a simple Declaration.
2. If Russia and Ukraine do not agree to sign the Declaration, this could mean that they are staking on the change of negotiators on behalf of RM in the process of settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict, obviously, after the parliamentary elections to take place in spring 2005. This might explain the outbreak of phobias and concerns on behalf of governing party ideologists and governmental mass media.
3. The governmental press acknowledges that there is a big question mark there with regards to "the efficacy of this document"<sup>8</sup>. Still, it is launching itself into a propagandistic campaign blaming the opposition of skepticism and affirming "it is easy to presume that this Declaration will also mean an assurance given by Chisinau administration to the West that Moldova entirely commits to democracy and Western values". The state press cannot admit that Chisinau authorities have the obligation to

observe their own Constitution, without having to assure the West about it. Thus, we must be talking about a bargain: the West signs the Declaration on Stability and Security of RM, and Chisinau commits to observe its own Constitution.

4. The main propagandistic trick consists in the fact that "public" mass media do not refer to the signing of the Pact or Declaration, but of the "document" on the Stability and Security of RM. It is the simplest and most comfortable way of exploiting the ignorance of the ordinary citizens; it is not necessary to explain the difference and eventual consequences of signing "the document".
5. The verbal, extremely tough, statements about ending negotiations with the separatist leaders, renunciation to the five-sided format of negotiations and the federalist formula etc., as usual, are not followed by the denunciation of bilateral documents or of those signed within the five-sided framework. Thus, the governors leave the doors open to go back to the status quo. When the President declares a radical measure, the official propaganda presents him as extremely courageous; when he must go back to the status quo; the same propaganda presents him as a wise pacifier. The courage and wisdom of the Moldovan authorities are thus permanently alternated, although things do not change in RM.
6. An incontestably positive factor is observed in the external policy of RM. It is related to the evolution from the Presidency's intention in 2001 to "play on the contradictions between the big powers and neighbors of RM", to the policy of "mediating the compromise between the big powers and the neighbors of RM" within the SSPRM.
7. However, for a future progress in foreign policy, solving the Transdnistrian conflict, etc., the Moldovan Parliament should have adopted the relevant legal acts clearly outlining foreign policy priorities and Transdnistrian conflict resolution benchmarks, thus putting an end to the teetering improvisations that only harm RM. The strategic relations among the big powers are characterized by a high degree of inertia, while teetering and unfocussed policy of RM only creates confusion and perturbations in those relations.

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<sup>1</sup> "Stability and Security Pact for Moldova - a new initiative of President Vladimir Voronin", Moldova suverana, no. 89, of 2 June 2004

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem

<sup>3</sup> "Let's dot all 'i's and cross all 't's" (Russ.), Nezavisimaya Moldova, no. 8-9, of 16 January 2004

<sup>4</sup> Voronin signed his weakness (Russ.), Moldavskie vedomosti, no. 41á of 2 June 2004

<sup>5</sup> "At the intersection of all mischief. Can the Transdnistrian loop throttle Moldova?" (Russ.), Nezavisimaya Moldova, no. 162-163, of 6 August 2004

<sup>6</sup> "Who and what fishes in the Transnistrian whirlpool" (Russ.), Communist, no. 34-38, of 24 Sept. 2004 - 22 Oct. 2004

<sup>7</sup> "USA and EU have called Russia to sign the declaration about the stability and security for Moldova", Moldova suverana, no.199 of 12 Nov. 2004

<sup>8</sup> "How Western chancelleries will sign the Pact for Moldova", Moldova suverana, no. 193 of 5 Nov. 2004



## Barometer of Public Opinion: deja vu or ... change may be?

Viorel Cibotaru, 1 December 2004

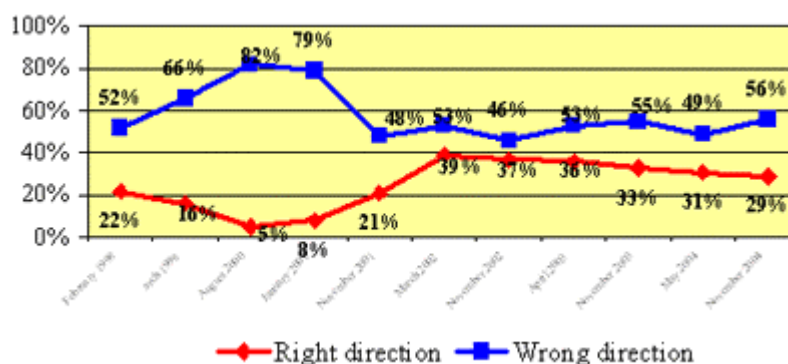
Since 1998 Soros-Moldova Foundation launched a project on fair and transparent coverage of the socio-political and economic developments, on access to information for civil society by means of *Barometer of Public Opinion*. So far, eleven polls were produced the last one being released for October-November 2004. Topics covered by the research are many: political options, rating of the major political parties and leaders, living standards, Government's economic and social policies, other areas<sup>1</sup>. It has become already a tradition for the results of the *Barometer* to be released twice a year in spring and fall. Usually this event triggers stringent debates in the political and media circles of the Republic of Moldova.

Several factors contribute to the credibility of the research: 1) a group of well-known independent experts supervise elaboration of questionnaires and validate the results; 2) correctness of the opinion polls conducted by the most credible sociological institutions in Moldova are verified by another institution so as to avoid any distortion; 3) each new opinion poll includes 30-40% of general questions that enable a though analysis of developments and trends in the public opinion, similarly new questions that are high on the political, social and economic agenda are included in the poll; 4) every time new techniques, methods and approaches are used so as to enable the use of the opinion poll results in developing public policies.

Once the results were released on November 16, 2004 media and analysts alike turned their attention to the immediate impact of the results, leaving the analysis of tendencies and changes for later. Still, it is exactly those changes that are of great interest given the upcoming parliamentary elections in Moldova, as well as recent developments as regards elections in Ukraine, Romania, but also Russian Federation, Belarus and Georgia.

The latest *Barometer* clearly shows a change in peoples' attitudes as regards country development. Commencing February 1998 opinions on this issue teetered. Throughout 1998-2000 the number of respondents who believed Republic of Moldova stepped on the wrong path surged from 52% to 82% and dropped in 2002 to 46%.

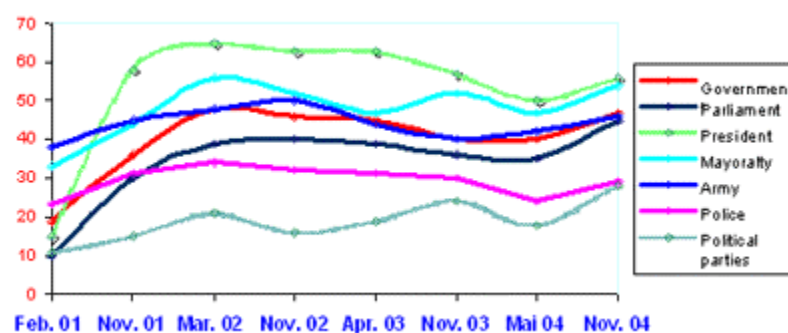
**Table 1. Attitudes on the country development (1998-2004)**



During the time of major social transformations individual values take the centre stage, which are closely related to the social values. Cultural and spiritual changes, that is shifts in values, stem from changes in public administration, economy, technological or political developments. In this respect, of special interest are the results as regards confidence in public and private institutions. This specifically refers to the support to domestic policies that determine the degree of political stability in the society as well as the level of democracy in the country. The confidence in various state institutions (Government, Parliament, Presidency) as a rule depends on the social-political situation and manipulation of public opinion.

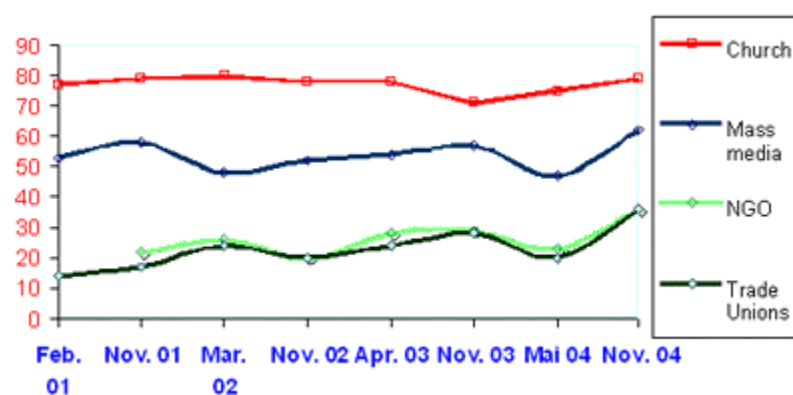
For instance in 1998 the opinion poll conducted in March showed that confidence in the Presidency was 57%, Government 30%, and a low one in Parliament 16%. Things changed in 2001 on the eve of parliamentary elections when confidence in President was only 15%, in Government - 19%, Parliament - 10%. Table 2 illustrates how things evolved since 2001.

**Table 2. Confidence in state institutions (2001-2004)**



In 2004, out of all public institutions citizens trust the President (56%) and mayoralty (54%) the most, both registering a 6% surge as compared to May 2004. Also surging is the confidence in media with 62% of the respondents having a somewhat or high confidence (15% increase). However, during those years the church has been the most trusted institution. (Table 3).

**Table 3. Confidence in civil society institutions (2001-2004).**



The latest survey indicates what 52% of the respondents are not happy with the current economic situation in the country. Interestingly, different categories of respondents see different solutions.

In general, 38% view that a better enforcement of the laws is the solution, 36% developing industrial enterprises, 35% see the solution in fighting crime. Respondents in rural areas see the solution in supporting farmers - 38%. At the same time, 21% of the young respondents age 18-29 see the solution in changing the country leadership.

In a related note, given the approaching elections the last opinion poll shows an increased interest in politics, i.e. 10% over May 2004. Thus, 28% of the respondents say they are interested or very much interested in politics. Respondents age 45-59 years are the most interested in politics (32% are interested or very much interested), as are those in the urban area - 31%.

As for confidence in political figures, several of them registered an increase over May 2004 and even 2003, namely one of the leaders of "Moldova Democrata" - Dumitru Braghis (21% have a high or very high confidence, as compared to 19% in 2003 and 12% in May 2004); leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova, Dumitru Diacov (11% as compared to 9% in 2003 and 5% in May 2004); one of the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party of Moldova Oazu Nantoi (currently 19%, as compared to 14% in 2003 and 13% in May 2004); Parliament Speaker, Eugenia Ostapciuc (currently 30%, over 26% in 2003 and 23% in May 2004); leader of the Christian Democratic Peoples' Party, Iurie Rosca (currently 17%, over 14% in 2003 and 10% in May 2004); leader of the Social Liberal Party, Oleg Serebrian (currently 14%, over 9% in 2003 and 8% in May 2004). The only one to see a decline in the rating was Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev (33% as compared to 44% in 2003 and 43% in May 2004). Vladimir Voronin enjoys the highest rating with 59%.

If Parliamentary elections had to be held in Moldova next Sunday, 62% of the respondents would vote for the Party of Communists. Those are people over 45 having a low or average income and incomplete secondary education.

The great majority of citizens (86%) believe the President should be elected by all the citizens, while 35% consider that President Voronin has the greatest chances to be elected as the next President after 2005 parliamentary elections.

Noteworthy, the last *Barometer* takes a closer look at the swing voters as well as factors that influence citizen's choice in elections. Many more respondents decide whom to vote during the electoral campaign or even on the eve of elections. This explains the growing interest towards media that wields a heavy influence on the voter's choice.

Party of Communists and Christian Democrats have the most loyal supporters and potential voters. Still, the two parties have the lowest potential to attract the votes of the swing voters, i.e. about 25%. In contrast, Democratic Moldova might attract up to 50% of the swing votes.

Albeit many analysts interpret electoral options "deterministically", the opinion poll provides a wide berth for forecasts as regards the upcoming parliamentary elections. Firstly, it is clear that electoral context and observance of the "rules of the game" would have a crucial impact. An illustration to this effect is Ukraine where people no longer accept deviations from democratic norms. Secondly, there is a huge gap between voters' expectations and contestants' ability to keep up their promises made in elections. Thirdly, it is hard to assess at the moment the possible impact of the foreign influence on the election results. Fourthly, "seasonal" differences in the

respondents' options and attitudes are too obvious. Opinion poll clearly shows a dependence on migration in and out. That is why the timing of elections would prove crucial in elections.

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<sup>1</sup> The last opinion poll was conducted throughout October 26 - November 10, 2004 on a sample of 1,446 people from 81 localities, representative for the adult population of the Republic of Moldova (excluding Transdnistria). The maximal sampling error  $\pm 2.6\%$ .

## **Fifth Congress of the Party of Communists**

Igor Botan, 16 December 2004

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On December 11 Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova gathered for its fifth congress. What made the event so special was the complete secrecy surrounding it. Not that there was much more information on the previous congresses. It became clear two months ago that Party of Communists was carefully concealing its activity. It remained tight-lipped on the plenary of the Union of the Communist Parties (PC) from the former Soviet Union (UCP-CPSU) which Moldovan delegation was supposed to attend. Another illustration, speeches made by the Communist leaders at November 7 meeting on the anniversary of the October Bolshevik revolution reconfirming their commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideals were never made public.

So, the fifth congress was no exception. Draft documents (political program and amended bylaws) as well as the location of the Congress were kept secret up until the Congress. Mass media access to the event was limited with only state-owned and media affiliated to the ruling party being allowed access. The secrecy went to the most ludicrous length as the Communists' own newspaper "Communistul" which was to be published on the eve of the congress provided scarce details on the agenda and location of the event, and on top of that, was not distributed as usual but only two days after the event.

Nor were decisions taken by the plenary of the Central Committee on December 7 confirming the congress agenda were made public. According to the bylaws of the Party of Communists the agenda of the congress is made public at least three months prior to the event, that is why those who were really interested had to look for the decisions taken by the plenary of the Central Committee held on May 15, when the date of the Congress was decided and agenda was made public. It included: a) political report by Central Committee; b) report by Central Revision Commission; c) report on party program; d) report on modifications and completions to party bylaws; e) election of the party chair; f) election of the Central Committee; g) election of the Central Revision Commission. May plenary also set the representation mechanism to the congress with one delegate representing 30 party members.

Then what were the reasons for such manners that are more in the style of a clandestine rather than a ruling party? The answer is - avoiding any scandal around evolutions within the party. Indeed, Party of Communists started its ideological teetering right after acceding to power in February 2001. One year later President Vladimir Voronin also Chair of the ruling party was cited by governmental "Moldova Suverana" (February 21, 2002) as saying "I don't want to build Communism in Moldova, nor socialism. Nowadays it would be an utopia". And this despite the provisions in the party political program providing for edifying socialism and communism in line with Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Later on, the need to modernize the party was discussed by the plenary of the Central Committee of May 2002. And finally, during the celebration of 10th anniversary of re-establishing Communist Party in October last year, party chair tried to answer the question "Who are the Moldovan Communists today? Where are they going?" Back then, President Voronin said "the real strength of the Party of Communists lies in the force of ideas, in the ability to argue them and stand up for them". He criticized "left radicals" blaming them for "political short-sightedness and naiveness". According to the President, the latter did not

comprehend that "going back to socialism" by means of nationalising private property was impossible as "in the Republic of Moldova practically every citizen holds private property". In response to accusations that the party political programme lacked the thesis on dictatorship of the proletariat President replied "what proletariat! what working class are we talking about when the country industry has been ruined? Only a blind would not realize that in a relatively short period the notion of working class has finally devalued". Those answers convinced the "dogmatic" party members that Communist leaders are following the path of "opportunism and revisionism".

It is known for a fact that Communism ideological rhetoric and principles were replaced by new ones. Currently, PC has in its arsenal great many ideas targeted at "consolidation of RM statehood" and integration into European Union, albeit its bylaws and political program clearly provide "establishing a brotherly Union of CIS nations based on new principles". "Moldovenism" has become the true ideological pylon of the PC, while efforts are made to show the continuity in edifying Moldovan state: from its forefathers like Stefan cel Mare to President Vladimir Voronin. Orthodox Christianity has been chosen as the link between various historic stages. Thus, Stefan cel Mare was building churches, while incumbent ruling is restoring them under the watchful eye of the national TV cameras. Undoubtedly, Moldovan citizens have seen the many phases of the PC morphing, the most tearing illustration was the National TV report featuring Communist MPs at the *subbotnik* at Capriana Monastery when ladies were cleaning the windows while men were digging ditch for the communication cables. The message was far too clear - that is how historic continuity is secured and "strategic communications are built" by uniting atheists and believers around the ruling party.

The fifth congress was only supposed to reflect in the party documents the party's "Transfiguration", which in itself bears some risks. And this because any delegate that is a follower of "purity of ideas" might cite the party bylaws providing that party members may be sanctioned or even ousted from the party for actions running counter to party program and bylaws. Analysts say that in order to avoid any kind of surprises inspired by the principledness of some party members certain caution measures were taken. Firstly, meetings of the party members were held in the territorial branches several months prior to the congress with many of the leaders of party territorial structures being replaced by those who were more flexible to ideological teetering. Secondly, preparations for the congress were kept secret. Thirdly, Communist leaders talk modernizing the party but do not renounce to Communist party name, old symbols and idols. It was probably decided to take a stance that would conceal any inconsistencies between the party documents and its actions, between future aspirations and obsolete symbols not consistent with the future visions but still bringing electoral dividends in a country ravaged by poverty. Curiously, representatives of the political bloc Citizens' Union "Patria-Rodina" (UCPR) founded by two socialist parties and several communist-oriented groups had to ask the permission of local government to hold demonstrations in several places where the congress might have been held. Those demonstrations appealed to the consciousness of the 641 delegates to the congress to oppose the policies promoted by the party leadership.

One may well understand PC's manoeuvres. What is striking is that the ruling party which took control over the main media outlets in the country, kept the citizens of the country in darkness for several days by remaining tight-lipped about the Congress, which even led to disinformation. For instance, Novosti-Moldova Agency reported that Central Committee convened right after the

congress and re-elected Vladimir Voronin as the party Chair. This runs counter to bylaws providing that only the congress is entitled to elect the Chair, it may only mean that the bylaws were amended. Four days later, governmental press reporting on the event left one question answered whether party program and bylaws were amended. For instance "Moldova Suverana" reported that "congress passed several amendments to bylaws so as to modernize party organism and re-elected Vladimir Voronin as the party Chair", however no mention was made on the modification of the political program. Conversely, other governmental newspaper "Nezavisimaia Moldova" reported that "Victor Stepaniuc briefed the delegates to the congress on the activity of the special commission working on the new wording of the Communist programme. Albeit the new wording has not been completed, Central Committee decided to make public at the congress the party stance as regards basic principles of state structure, social-economic and spiritual revival of the country. Without giving up on the previous ideals, today the party takes new approaches. Thus it acknowledges farmers' right on land. The party pleads for fostering national Moldovan culture, study of the Moldovan language and history. Those principles as well as many others would be the cornerstone of the new Party of Communists' programme". Media suggested that the revised party documents would be made public later on after parliamentary elections. This may only be fulfilled at another congress.

Having said that, one may well understand why ruling party hesitated or feared to revise its political program on the eve of elections, that is, political program would run counter to the electoral program. Why then convening a congress if the main party documents were not revised? There is only one answer - to complete the reshuffles in the party governing bodies. Firstly, the renewed membership of the governing bodies would be able to push through the revision of the party documents. In this respect, the statement made by Voronin during the congress is of great relevance: "it was a mistake of the majority faction to elect the Executive Secretary of the Central Committee as the leader of the faction in parliament. The two positions may not be held by the same person, no matter how efficient he might be". These words were addressed to Victor Stepaniuc whose task was "to revise the ideological arsenal of the Party of Communists and bring it in line with the realities of the day". Secondly, the renewed membership of the governing bodies would be the one to approve the list of PC candidates in the upcoming parliamentary elections. After the victory in upcoming elections there would be no obstacles to amend the party documents. Conversely, if they were to fail in elections "dogmatic" members would be the ones to blame for opposing any adjustments to the realities of the day. No doubt that ousted comrades will eventually speak up.

As it was to be expected, the press invited to the congress, mainly reported on President Voronin's speech who as usual talked of the hard legacy left by the previous rulings. He outlined the pylons of the future revised political program, likely to be found in the electoral program, namely: consolidating RM's sovereignty and independence, multiethnic nation of Moldova, raising quality of life, fighting corruption, EU integration, etc - all of them were reiterated many times. No reference whatsoever was made to the reshuffles in the party's governing bodies.

It is all-too-clear that the much awaited party modernization is far from really happening. Undoubtedly, the effort to modernize the party is a positive sign in itself. However, the secrecy surrounding the congress is in line with the non-transparent governing when important documents such as Conception of European Integration or other documents of major interest

envisaging settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict - Declaration of Stability and Security for RM are kept secret. Obviously, these runs counter to the alleged modernization and European integration aspirations.

Much has been said about Party of Communists stealing oppositions' best tunes after coming to power: right on property, settling Transdnistrian conflict, European integration, Christian values, etc. Still deeds tell more than words. And in this respect PC is far from having a modern image. For instance, Christian-Democratic People's Party one of the main Communists' political foes held its congress on May 16 in the Great National Assembly square with anyone interested free to attend. In contrast, ruling party has kept even the location of the congress secret. So, we can only wonder: how long would it take for the PC to modernize and become a truly left European party and convene its congresses in the open for anyone to attend? When would the day come for the members of Party of Communists to listen with a beer in their hands to the party leaders reporting with a huge smile rather than a grin on their faces?